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WHAT INFLUENCES CHINESE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING WRITING IN ENGLISH?

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Abstract

This study investigated Chinese undergraduate students' beliefs about learning writing in English. The investigation focused on factors that influence the students' writing beliefs, in specific, gender, year of study, investment of time in learning and English language proficiency. A survey was carried out in a university in Beijing, China, with 246 undergraduate students majoring in the English Language and Literature as the participants. Data were collected with a questionnaire which was designed based on translation and adaptation of BALLI (The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory). Statistical analysis revealed gender difference in beliefs about 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English'; Year of Study was revealed to be associated with beliefs about the nature of learning writing in English; Investment of time in self-study was found to be associated with students' beliefs about 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English'; students' self-perceived proficiency was found to have association with beliefs about 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' and 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English'. The findings are expected to call for attention of second language writing instructors to the possible interference of demographic factors, investment in learning and second language proficiency with students' beliefs about second language writing.

Key words:second language writing beliefs, gender, year of study, investment in learning, self-perceived English proficiency

Introduction

Learners' beliefs have been a focus of research of second language learning for decades. From beliefs about general English learning to beliefs about some specific aspect of English learning, the academic exploration proceeds deeper and in a more focused way. Beliefs about writing is one of these specific research foci. The previous studies of writing beliefs are mainly focused on the impact of writing beliefs on writing performances. In general, it has been revealed that learners' beliefs about writing have impact on writing performances and writing quality (Baaijen, Galbraith & de Gloppe, 2014; Graham, Schwartz & MacArthur, 1993; Li 2007; Polio & Shi, 2012; White & Bruning, 2005). Writing beliefs are considered an influential factor to learning behaviors. In previous research literature of the influence of writing beliefs on writing performances, the affective and cognitive approach is distinctive with a relatively larger quantity of studies than that of other approaches. Studies as representatives of this approach include the study of transmissional and transactional beliefs by White and Bruning (2005) and further studies related to it.

Despite the achievements in investigating the influence of writing beliefs on writing performances, so far, the opposite direction of influence- the influence on writing beliefs has been rarely addressed. This study is expected to contribute to broadening the scope of research on writing beliefs through fulfilling the research gap. This study aims at revealing influencing factors to writing beliefs through investigating foreign language writing beliefs- Chinese undergraduates' beliefs about writing in English, in specific.

Literature Review

The Influence of Writing Beliefs on Writing Performances

Studies of the impact of writing beliefs on writing performances and writing quality dominates the research of writing beliefs. A significant representative of the studies is the implicit model of writing beliefs which was proposed in White and Bruning (2005) and was adopted and further investigated in some other studies. The model contains two types of writing beliefs- the transmissional beliefs and the transactional beliefs. These two types of writing beliefs were conceptualized based on Schraw and Bruning's (1996) and Schraw's (2000) work on reading beliefs. The transmissional writing beliefs and the transactional writing beliefs were considered to be in association with different levels of affective and cognitive engagement during the writing process. The former is associated with lower levels while the latter is associated with higher levels (White & Bruning, 2005). That is, writers holding the transmissional beliefs 'would envision writing as a way to transfer information from authoritative sources to the reader in a manner that limits how the writer's ideas are reflected in the text' while writers holding these beliefs 'would view the purpose of writing as a way to personally and critically construct the text by actively integrating their own thinking into the process' (White & Bruning, 2005, p. 168). Consequently, these two types of writing beliefs have different influences on writing quality. Transmissional writing beliefs were revealed to have negative correlation with the overall writing quality while transactional writing beliefs were found to have positive correlation with the overall writing quality. Also, transmissional writing beliefs were found to have impact on idea-content development, voice, organization, and conventions; transactional writing beliefs were found to have influence on organization and fluency.

The relationship between transactional and transmissional writing beliefs and writers' engagement was further explored in Baaijen et al. (2014). Two hypotheses- 'the single-process hypothesis' and 'the dual-process hypothesis', were proposed in the study. The former is that "..., transactional and transmissional beliefs are assumed to have their effects through a single underlying dimension of engagement which corresponds to a contrast between a knowledge-telling approach to writing and a knowledge-transforming approach to writing" (p. 82). And, the latter is that "..., transactional beliefs are assumed to be beliefs about the extent to which the writing process should be a top-down or a bottom-up process. Transmissional beliefs are assumed to be beliefs about the type of content to be written about but not in themselves to have a direct influence on the process that the writer engages in" (p. 82). Statistical analysis results of the study denied the single-process hypothesis but supported the dual-process hypothesis. In specific, significant correlations were found between transmissional beliefs and text quality; however, their association was not affected by the type of planning which was found to have significant influence on the relationship between transactional beliefs and text quality. Transactional-belief-holder writers were found to be more likely to develop understanding through writing and their increased understanding was found to be associated with text modification.

The transmissional and the transactional beliefs were studied along with two dimensions of writing beliefs in Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio and Newman's (2014) study: audience orientation which is concerned with the writer's sense of audience and recursive process which is concerned with revision or rewriting. Relations of these four dimensions with writing performance and writing apprehension were examined. Correlation analysis revealed that audience orientation was positively related to writing performance and self-efficacy; transaction was found to be positively related to self-efficacy but not related to writing performance; transmission was found to be negatively related to writing performance and self-efficacy but positively related to writing apprehension. Regression analysis revealed that audience orientation was a positive predictor of self-efficacy while transaction and transmission were negative predictors of it. And, recursive process had no significant predicting power over self-efficacy.

The roles of transmissional and transactional writing beliefs in tasks involving reading and writing were investigated in Mateos et al. (2011) together with epistemological beliefs and reading beliefs. Significant correlations were found between epistemological beliefs, reading beliefs and writing beliefs. 'In particular, significant correlations were found between the fixed ability factor and transaction writing beliefs; between the quick learning factor and transaction writing beliefs; between the simple knowledge factor and reading beliefs, and between the simple knowledge factor and writing beliefs' (Mateos et al. 2011, p. 290).

The Influence on Writing Beliefs by Other Factors

Besides the studies of the influence of writing beliefs on writing performances, research efforts were made to investigate the influence on writing beliefs from other affective and sociocultural constructs. Identity as a construct was addressed in Li (2007). Li investigated the interplay of the writer's identity and beliefs about writing in writing processes. 'Findings from the study indicate that the notions of culture, identity, and beliefs are tightly interwoven' (p. 60). Learners' first culture was found to influence their identity construction and writing beliefs formation in a second language setting.

Influence of gender and grade level on learners' writing beliefs were investigated in Pajares and Valiante (1999). They investigated grade level and gender differences of middle school students' beliefs about writing in their first language. The study was focused on self-efficacy beliefs which refer to 'students' beliefs about their academic capabilities' (p. 391). The study revealed that there was no significant gender difference in students' writing self-efficacy beliefs; however, girl students were more likely to consider themselves better writers than peers than boy students. Pajares and Valiante concluded that '[t]hese findings suggest that girls and boys may use a different metric when responding to traditional self-efficacy scales' (p. 390). Significant differences were found in grade level. Grade 6 students were found to believe that they had higher self-efficacy in writing than Grade 7 and Grade 8 students; and, Grade 7 students were found to believe that they had lower writing self-efficacy than Grade 6 and Grade 8 students.

In Wan (2014), the influence of sharing personal beliefs with peers on students' writing beliefs and writing practice was investigated. The focus of study was explicit metaphors that the students created. Metaphor-oriented intervention from peers was found to be helpful to students with "broadening their conceptions and understandings of various aspects of academic writing; practising thinking critically about their own writing, and leading to positive changes in their beliefs about academics writing and their own writing practices" (p. 53).

The review of previous research literature shows that even though efforts were made to explore the interaction between writing beliefs and other constructs, yet they were rare. There is still gap in research of impact on writing beliefs from other constructs, calling for further research efforts.

Research Methodology

Research Questions

The current study aims at contributing to filling in the research gap through investigating the influence on Chinese college students' writing beliefs from factors such as gender, year of study, investment in learning writing and the English language proficiency. Specific research questions include:

- a. Is there gender difference in the participants' beliefs about learning writing in English?
- b. Is there any difference in beliefs about learning writing in English between undergraduate students of different Years of Study (Year 2 and Year 3)?
- c. Is there any association between the participants' beliefs about learning writing in English and their self-perceived English proficiency?
- d. Is there any association between the participants' beliefs about learning writing in English and their investment in the learning?

The Survey Participants

Two hundred and forty-six (246) undergraduate students majoring in the English Language and Literature from a university in Beijing, China, were invited to participate in the survey. They were students of the second year and the third year of a four-year program for Bachelor's Degree of Arts. And, they were taking courses of writing in English which are compulsory courses in the program. One hundred and sixty (160) participants in this survey are female students and thirty-nine (39) are male students. Also, one hundred and sixteen (116) participants are the second-year students and eighty-two (82) are the third-year students. One participant did not identify his/her Year of Study.

Research Methods and The Instrument

The Research Method

This study adopted the quantitative research method. A survey was conducted with a questionnaire designed based on Beliefs about Learning Writing in English Inventory by Wang (2018) which had been designed through translating and adapting BALLI of Horwitz (1988).

BALLI is The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory which was designed and applied to the study of American college students' beliefs about foreign language learning by Horwitz (1988). BALLI has been widely cited, adapted and adopted in research on language learning. It is considered by scholars for example, Abdi and Asadi (2015), as a prominent representative for the normative approach to research on language learning beliefs. In this approach, beliefs about language learning are generally regarded as the learners' attitudes, opinions and notions. For example, in Horwitz (1988), 'viewpoints' and 'opinions' were used to refer to the students' beliefs about language learning. The main reason for the current study to adopt the BALLI approach to exploring writing beliefs is that BALLI is multi-dimensional and it is helpful to explore and to gain a relatively comprehensive view of learners' beliefs about second language learning.

BALLI had been applied to studying second language learners' writing beliefs before the current study. But there were only a couple of studies and the studies were mostly restricted to the description of the subjects' writing beliefs. Booth (2003) adopted BALLI to investigate the relationship between second language learners' and tutors' beliefs about writing. Through a small-scaled survey with 33 student respondents and interviews of 5 tutors, Booth's study revealed that there was gap between learners' and tutors' beliefs about second language writing in an academic context. For example, the student respondents of the study showed the inclination to emphasize the language aspect of writing and the cultural factors such as being in the country where the target language is spoken. To the tutors, '...their learners did not fully understand what the academic cultural entails in relation to writing, and learners were perhaps more concerned with the language aspects rather than the academic writing skills of referencing, analysis, argument, etc.' (p. 3). Wang (2018) investigated Chinese undergraduate students' beliefs about writing in English which is a foreign language to them. But the investigation was restricted to descriptive study of the students' beliefs about learning writing in English. The current study is focused on factors that may have association with Chinese undergraduates' beliefs about learning writing in English.

The Instrument

The questionnaire which was designed for data collection contains two sections: the first section is the Beliefs about Learning Writing in English Inventory designed by Wang (2018) through translating and adapting BALLI of Horwitz (1988) and the second section has six questions on demographic information, the self-perceived English proficiency, the investment of time in self-study after class, and motivations for self-study after class.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants. One hundred and ninety-nine (199) completed questionnaires were returned. All the 199 questionnaires were found to be valid through data cleaning procedures. Data obtained through these questionnaires were analyzed with the statistical analysis software-IBM SPSS 19.0.

Results

Thirty-six (36) variables were created based on the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis, the Independent-sample T-test, and correlational analysis were applied. The results are presented below.

Reliability Test Results

Thirty-one interval variables were generated based on the 31 items of the Beliefs about Learning Writing in English Inventory. These 31 variables were grouped into five dimensions according to the classification of BALLI. Cronbach alpha values of five scales based on the five dimensions of the inventory are 0.432, 0.260, 0.249, 0.482, 0.608 respectively. According to 'Cronbach alpha values if items deleted' and close reading of items in the inventory, the following items were deleted from the five dimensions: Item 13 and Item 23 from Dimension 1, 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English'; Item 1 and Item 31 from Dimension 2, 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English'; Item 6 and Item 10 from Dimension 3, 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English'; Item 11 from Dimension 4, 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English'; and Item 29 from Dimension 5, 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English'. Five scales consisting variables generated based on the rest of items of the inventory were achieved.

The reliability test was conducted and the results are presented in Table 1. The Cronbach alpha values show that the five scales are reliable to test the participants' beliefs in learning English writing. However, it is worth noting that the Cronbach alpha values are only moderate.

Table 1 The reliability test results

The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English	Cronbach alpha values
3. [The difficulty of] writing in English that I am trying to learn	.563
4. There is no difference between writing in English and writing in Chinese.	
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to write in English very well.	
26. It is easier to write than to listen in English.	
27. It is easier to write than to speak in English.	
Aptitude for Learning Writing in English	Cronbach alpha values
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn writing in English.	.486
9. It is easier for someone who is good at writing in Chinese to learn writing in English.	
14. I have an aptitude of writing in English.	
21. Women are better than men at writing in English.	
30. People who can write in English are very intelligent.	
The Nature of Learning Writing in English	Cronbach alpha values
7. It is necessary to know the culture of English-speaking countries in order to write in English.	.514
15. Learning writing in English is mostly a matter of learning many new words.	
19. Learning writing in English is mostly a matter of learning many grammatical rules.	
24. Learning writing in English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese.	
Strategies for Learning Writing in English	Cronbach alpha values
8. One should not write anything in English until s/he is sure that the grammar is correct.	.476
12. If one is not sure what word to use to convey meaning, s/he has to consult the dictionary.	
16. Practice is important to writing in English.	
17. I feel uneasy to display my work of writing in English in front of other people.	
18. If one allowed himself/herself to make mistakes in the beginning of learning writing in English, it would be hard for him/her to get rid of them later on.	
20. It is important to practice writing in class.	
Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English	Cronbach alpha values
22. If my ability of writing in English is good, I will have many opportunities to use it.	.588
25. If I write in English very well, it will help me get a good job.	
28. Ability of writing in English is valued in China.	
Notes: N=198	

Descriptive Analysis Results

Beliefs about Learning Writing in English

Based on the reliability test results, five variables were calculated through adding the values of variables in the five scales respectively. These five variables are named 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English', 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English', 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English', 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' and 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English'. The value of 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' ranges from 5 to 25, the value of 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English' from 5 to 25, the value of 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English' from 4 to 20, the value of 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' from 6 to 30, and the value of 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English' from 3 to 15. Descriptive analysis was applied to these five variables and the results are shown in Table 2.

According to design of the scale, the bigger the value of 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' is, the easier the respondent considers learning writing in English. Therefore, the Mean, Median and Mode values of 'The Difficulty of Learning English' show that the participants considered learning writing in moderately difficult.

A bigger value of 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English' means the respondent is more likely to hold the belief in presupposed impact on the aptitude for learning from factors such as talent and gender. The Mean, Median and Mode values of 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English' show that the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the presupposed impact on aptitude for learning writing in English. They held an ambivalent attitude.

A bigger value of 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English' means the respondent is more likely to believe that in nature learning writing in English is a process of learning in the traditional grammar approach. That is, learning writing in English is mostly a process of learning vocabulary and grammatical rules. The Mean, Median and Mode values of 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English' show that the participants disagreed with this belief.

A bigger value of 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' means that the respondent is more likely to believe in strategies of a prescriptive approach. S/he is conscious of correct grammar and word choice and considers practice important. The Mean, Median and Mode values of 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' show that the participants tended to agree with this belief. They showed an ambivalent attitude, not firmly holding this belief.

A bigger value of 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English' means the respondent is more likely to hold an instrumental motivation for learning writing in English. The Mean, Median and Mode values of 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English' show that the participants had an instrumental motivation for learning writing in English.

Table 2 The descriptive analysis results of Chinese undergraduate students' beliefs about learning writing in English

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English	14.82	15.00	15	2.624
Aptitude for Learning Writing in English	15.24	15.00	15	2.511
The Nature of Learning Writing in English	9.67	9.00	9	2.139
Strategies for Learning Writing in English	20.90	21.00	21	2.932
Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English	11.08	11.00	12	1.809

N=199

The Self-Perceived Proficiency in English

The participants were asked to self-evaluate their proficiency in English with a five-point Likert scale of which '1' represents 'very bad' while '5' represents 'very good'. The descriptive analysis results are presented in Table 3.

The majority of participants (70.9%) reported that their proficiency in English is ‘neither good nor bad’. These results reveal that the participants in this study consider their proficiency in English average.

Table 3 The self-perceived proficiency in English

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
What do you think of your proficiency in English?	3.04	3.00	3	.642

Notes: $N=199$

Time Invested in Self-Study of Writing in English after Class

The participants were asked to report how much time they usually use every week to learn writing in English after class with a multiple-choice question in the questionnaire. A nominal variable was generated based on this question. Frequency test shows that the majority of participants (50.3%) usually spend 1-2 hours (2 hours included) every week in learning writing in English after class; 30.7% of the participants usually spend less than one hour every week; 14.6% of the participants spend 2-3 hours (3 hours included) every week; and the rest of 4.5% spend more than three hours every week in learning writing in English after class.

Motivations for Investment in Self-Study of Writing in English after Class

A multiple-choice question was designed on the participants’ motivations of spending time in learning writing in English after class. A nominal variable was generated based on this question. Frequency test shows that 66.3% of participants reported that the primary reason for them to spend time in learning writing in English after class was to complete the instructor’s assignments; 21.6% of the participants reported that their primary reason was to achieve good grades in exams; and the rest of 12.1% reported that interest in writing in English was their primary reason to spend time in learning and practice after class.

Independent-Sample T-Test Results

Group Difference in Beliefs about Learning Writing in English by Gender

An independent-sample T-test was conducted with Gender as the independent variable and the five variables on Chinese undergraduate students’ beliefs about learning writing in English, ‘The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English’, ‘Aptitude for Learning Writing in English’, ‘The Nature of Learning Writing in English’, ‘Strategies for Learning Writing in English’ and ‘Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English’ as the dependent variables. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means revealed that there were significant differences between female students and male students only in ‘Aptitude for Learning Writing in English’. The results are shown in Table 4. It is worth noting that there is a big difference between the number of female students and that of male students. Data collection of this study was carried out on a random sampling basis. The big difference in the number of participants in the two groups complies with the status quo that there are usually far more female students than male students in foreign language majors, which should be taken into consideration in understanding the Independent-sample T-test results.

As mentioned previously, a bigger value of ‘Aptitude for Learning Writing in English’ means the respondent is more likely to hold the belief in presupposed impact on the aptitude for learning from factors such as talent and gender. The results show that male students agreed with the presupposed impact on learning writing in English more than female students did.

Table 4 Group Difference in Beliefs about Learning Writing in English by Gender (Independent Sample T-Test)

Item	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>	
				F	M	F	M
Aptitude for Learning Writing in English	-4.336	196	.000	14.88	16.76	2.227	3.053

Notes: $p<.05$ (two-tailed); F=female students, $n=160$; M=male students, $n=38$.

Group Difference in Beliefs about Learning Writing in English by Year of Study

An independent-sample T-test was conducted with Year of Study as the independent variable and the five variables on Chinese undergraduate students’ beliefs about learning writing in English, ‘The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English’, ‘Aptitude for Learning Writing in English’, ‘The Nature of Learning Writing in

English', 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' and 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English' as the dependent variables.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means revealed that there were significant differences between students of the 2nd year and students of the 3rd year only in 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English'. The results are shown in Table 5.

A bigger value of 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English' means the respondent is more likely to believe that in nature learning writing in English is a process of learning in the traditional grammar approach. The results reveal that students of the 2nd year of study agreed more than those of the 3rd year with the belief that learning writing in English is mostly a process of learning vocabulary and grammatical rules.

Table 5 Group Difference in Beliefs about Learning Writing in English by Year of Study (Independent Sample T-Test)

Item	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>	
				Y2	Y3	Y2	Y3
The Nature of Learning Writing in English	2.095	196	.037	9.90	9.27	2.010	2.172

Notes: $p < .05$ (two-tailed); Y2= students of the second year of study, $n=116$; Y3=students of the third year of study, $n=82$.

Group Difference in Beliefs about Learning Writing in English by Investment of Time in Self-Study

A variable was generated based on Question 4, Part II of the questionnaire- 'How much time do you spend in learning to write in English after class every week?'. The variable was transformed based on descriptive analysis results. That is, '1' and '2' were transformed into '1' for the new variable which means 'less than 2 hours (2 hours included) every week' and '3' and '4' were transformed into '2' for the new variable which means 'more than 2 hours every week'. The new variable, 'Investment of Time in Self-study Every Week' was adopted as the independent variable into the Independent Sample T-test while the five variables on Chinese undergraduate students' beliefs about learning writing in English, 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English', 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English', 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English', 'Strategies for Learning Writing in English' and 'Motivations and Expectations for Learning Writing in English' were adopted as the dependent variables. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means revealed that there were significant differences between the two groups only in 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English'. The results are shown in Table 6.

According to design of the scale, the bigger the value of 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' is, the easier the participant considers learning writing in English. The results show that students that usually spend more than 2 hours (Group 2) in self-study of writing in English were more likely to consider learning writing in English easy than those that usually spend less than 2 hours every week (Group 1).

Table 6 Group Difference in Beliefs about learning writing in English by Investment of Time in Self-study Every Week (Independent Sample T-Test)

Item	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>	
				G1	G2	G1	G2
The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English	-2.394	43.55	.021	14.53	16.03	2.225	3.687

Notes: $p < .05$ (two-tailed); Group1 (G1)= spend less than 2 hours (2 hours included) every week, $n=161$; Group2 (G2)= spend more than 2 hours every week, $n= 38$.

Correlations between the Self-Perceived Proficiency in English and the Beliefs about Learning Writing in English

Pearson Product-moment Correlation analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between the participants' self-perceived proficiency in English and their beliefs about learning writing in English. The self-perceived proficiency in English was found to be moderately correlated with 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' ($r= 0.370$, $p= 0.000 < 0.05$, $N=198$) and 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English' ($r= 0.311$, $p= 0.000 < 0.05$, $N=197$). The results reveal that the better the participants thought their English proficiency was, the easier they considered learning writing in English; the better the participants thought their English proficiency was, the more likely they were to agree with presupposed impact on learning writing in English from factors such as talent and gender.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion of Research Findings

Data analysis of the current study identified four factors which have relationships with the students' beliefs about learning writing in English: gender, year of study, investment of time in self-study, and self-perceived proficiency in English. These factors were revealed to have impact on various dimensions of the students' beliefs about learning writing in English.

Gender was revealed to have influence on the students' beliefs about 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English'. Male students agreed with the presupposed impact on learning writing in English more than female students did. They associated writing aptitude in English with talents and a 'natural' transference from Chinese writing aptitude. 'Talent' sounds primordial rather than constructible. If a student attributed his/her achievement or frustration in learning writing in English to 'talents', there would be the risk of lacking realistic and practical encouraging force for them to sustain learning. In this sense, male students' beliefs seem less constructivist than those of female students. At the same time, it is worth noting that in this study there is a big difference between the number of male students and that of female students. Therefore, caution should be taken to generalize the conclusion to the whole target population of second language writing learners. In addition, further study with in-depth interviews is suggested in order to explore reasons for the gender differences.

Year of Study was found to have association with 'The Nature of Learning Writing in English'. Students of the 2nd year of study agreed more than those of the 3rd year with the belief that learning writing in English is mostly a process of learning vocabulary and grammatical rules. This finding shows that students' beliefs are dynamic. The beliefs may change with time and what's more important, they may change as a result of taking course of writing in English and engaging in other learning activities about writing in English. Students that participated in this study received a course of writing in English in the 2nd year of study in which they are guided by the instructors to acquire knowledge and develop skills about writing traditional essays in English in college education context. After taking this course of two semesters, when they began their 3rd year of study, they may have had new understandings of learning writing in English. And, their beliefs change. Also, students of the 3rd year have a course of academic writing in English which is further study based on what they have learned in the course of writing in English in the 2nd year of study. Their experience of taking this course will contribute to their understanding of the nature of learning writing in English which will lead to changes in beliefs. All in all, students' beliefs about learning writing in English are not static. Their understanding of the nature of learning writing in English in particular changes with their different years of study in college. However, this study is restricted to identifying differences in students' beliefs about learning writing in English in association with their different years of study. It would be informative if further study could be conducted to investigate what in specific may cause the differences with in-depth interviews. For example, the role of courses of writing in English in causing the changes in students' beliefs should be probed into.

The investment of time in self-study was found to be associated with 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English'. Students that usually spend more than 2 hours (Group 2) in self-study of writing in English were more likely to consider learning writing in English easy than those that usually spend less than 2 hours every week. The investment of time in self-study is behavioral rather than characteristic like gender and year of study. The association between the investment of time in self-study and the students' beliefs about learning writing in English suggests that the beliefs about learning writing in English can be adjusted through learning behaviors. This study is limited to investigating the association between students' beliefs about learning writing in English and their investment of time in self-study after class. The specific mechanism of the association is beyond the scope of this study. But it is worthwhile to investigate the possible bridging factors between the students' investment of time in study and their beliefs. A hypothesis is that more investment of time and energy in learning may result in satisfactory achievements which may strengthen the student's belief in his/her aptitude in writing in English. And, confidence they gained from good aptitude may be a reason for them to consider the learning tasks easy. Further study is suggested to test this hypothesis.

Students' self-perceived proficiency of English was found to have association with beliefs about 'The Difficulty of Learning Writing in English' and 'Aptitude for Learning Writing in English'. The better the students thought their English proficiency was, the easier they would consider learning writing in English and the more likely they would be to agree with presupposed impact on learning writing in English from factors such as talent and gender. Proficiency of English is definitely the foundation for good writing ability in English. It is no surprise to find the association between the students' self-perceived proficiency of English and their beliefs about the difficulty of and the aptitude for learning writing in English. At the same time, confirming the association between the students' beliefs about learning writing in English and their English proficiency is significant to teaching and learning practice. It may be a helpful strategy for teachers of English writing to guide students who are not confident in their aptitude for learning writing in English to start changing the status quo with improving their English language proficiency.

Conclusions

In conclusion, students' beliefs about writing in English as a second/foreign language are affected by various factors. In this study, *gender*, *year of study*, *investment of time in self-study* and *language proficiency* have been found to have associations with the students' beliefs about learning writing in English.

Awareness of associations between these factors and students' beliefs about writing in English as a second/foreign language may offer some help to instructors of writing courses in understanding their students' attitudes towards the learning and offering proper instructions. For example, awareness of gender difference in students' writing beliefs may help the instructors to recognize differences in expectations, coping strategies, etc. between male students and female students. In this sense, they could have more realistic perception of different performances of both genders and offer appropriate directions. This is of practical value especially in courses of language majors in which usually the number of female students is much larger than that of male students. Also, understanding of the association between students' beliefs about writing and their investment in self-study may help the instructors to interfere with students' investment in learning. If students' investment of time in learning were unsatisfactory and led to possible under-achievements, the instructor could consider starting with correcting their inappropriate beliefs.

This study is limited to exploring what factors may have impact on students' writing beliefs. It will be very valuable in future studies to explore in-depth how these factors interact with students' writing beliefs with qualitative research methods. Also, incorporating students' performances in writing into research will be significant to investigating the association between second language writing beliefs and these factors.

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